

EMF Superfund Site info update at open houses

By LORI EDMO-SUPPAH

Sho-Ban News

FORT HALL — The Environmental Protection Agency conducted a couple of open houses March 11 and 12 regarding the Eastern Michaud Flats (EMF) Superfund Site involving the Simplot Don Plant and the old FMC phosphate plant.

The first was March 11 at the Shoshone-Bannock Hotel and Events Center where a few community members attended. The second was at center court Pine Ridge Mall in Pocatello on March 12.

The Fort Hall open house involved a bunch of poster boards set up around the Chief Pocatello room. If a technical person was available, they answered questions of those in attendance.

Kelly Wright, Shoshone-Bannock Environmental Waste program manager said Simplot is expanding the phosphorous gypsum stack towards the northwest corner of its site. The Tribes are concerned because the hazardous waste is moving closer to the reservation boundary that could impact groundwater although Simplot officials claim it's not going to.

FMC officials addressed what they're doing in capping and covering up the hazardous waste. The company has requested through EPA to crush the slag that has been put down on the ground but Wright said the Tribes concern is the technology of crushing generates dust — the slag has heavy metals in it, along with other hazards and the dust drifts towards the reservation, among other concerns.

During 2015, EPA is completing the first five-year review at the EMF Superfund Site. The review assesses whether the soil and groundwater activities identified in the Record of Decision (ROD) and Interim Record of Decision Amendments (IRODAs) when implemented, be protective of human health and environment.

Jannine Jennings, EPA remedial project manager for the Simplot Operable Unit, said they've contracted with Skeosolutions to gather information and draft a report. The Tribes are involved and a draft report should be available in June that will be shared with the Tribes. EPA will finalize the report later in the summer.

The EMF Superfund Site covers approximately 2,530 acres northwest of Pocatello according to EPA literature. There are two adjacent phosphate-ore processing facilities that began operations in the 1940s. FMC Corporation closed its plant in December 2001 but the J.R. Simplot Don Plant is still in operation. The EPA issued a ROD for the site in 1988. The interim IRODAs were issued for the Simplot portion in 2010 and for the FMC site in 2012.

FMC's cleanup plan for the former plant involves

elemental phosphorous, metals and radiation in soils, fill and groundwater. The plan places clean soil covers called "caps" over contaminated soils to protect people and the environment.

However tribal officials say capping ignitable and reactive waste in place is not a remediation but a cover-up.

Soil caps will be designed to minimize the amount of rain and melting snow from filtering through contaminated areas and further polluting the groundwater. FMC's plan also requires contaminated groundwater to be treated to protect local springs and the Portneuf River.

Work began in September 2014 at the FMC site grading/excavating the slag in the areas to receive soil caps. It continued through December when the work ceased for the winter. Construction work resumes next week and the grading phase is scheduled to be completed in June when soil cap installation begins. Soil cap installation on the graded surface is scheduled to be completed in December of this year.

Engineering design work to address contaminated groundwater is underway and the remedial design work will continue through this year with the system to be installed in 2016.

At the Simplot Don Plant the cleanup plan involves phosphorous, arsenic and other metals in the groundwater, local springs and the Portneuf River. The plan is supposed to address ongoing and past releases of contaminants near Simplot's phosphoric acid plant. A synthetic liner is being placed on the receiving surface of the gypsum stack to reduce the infiltration of contaminated water through the stack to groundwater. A series of wells have been installed so contaminated groundwater can be extracted before it flows into the Portneuf River.

Wright says from a technical standpoint EPA didn't coordinate with all involved so the public was well aware of the open houses. There was no ads ran in the Sho-Ban News notifying the public of the meetings or other notification. In addition, the Tribes are concerned Simplot's gypsum stack wastewater is leaking out along the rocks onto Bureau of Land Management property.

Jennings said EPA is aware of it and Simplot officials are working to pump water back into the lined portion of the stack so it doesn't accumulate and move back into groundwater. She said the solution is to complete the lining of the gypstack that won't be completed for another two years.

She added she is fairly new to the project and believes they had a pretty good turnout at the meetings.